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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes findings of an elementary educator's dissertation research, which examined plans of assistance that were used to remediate three teachers deemed incompetent. The study focused on the reasons for placing the teachers on a plan of assistance, the remediation procedure actually implemented, and the plan's final outcome. Teacher motivation and active representation by the local education association (LEA) representative were identified as the main factors in teachers' improvement. A conclusion is that plans of assistance work best when the teacher, principal, and education association work together as a team. It is recommended that teacher-assistance plans focus more on teacher improvement and development and less on fear and recrimination. (LMI)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Remediating Marginal Teachers

What Makes Plans of Assistance Work?

BY DOUGLAS HERMAN

Each year as summer draws to an end, America sends its children back to school. Most students return to classrooms with teachers who are well prepared and enthusiastic about teaching. But what about the minority of teachers whose efforts fall short? How can professional educators help these teachers? When teachers experience difficulty, how do their colleagues and supervisors find out about them? What do teachers do that causes administrators to scrutinize their behavior?

INSIDE

Around the State page 13

Bulletins in Review page 22

These are some of the questions I asked as I researched teacher competency. I examined plans of assistance that were used to remediate three teachers deemed incompetent. My study focused on why the teachers were placed on a plan of assistance, the remediation procedure actually implemented, and the final outcome of the plan. Through intensive study of these three cases, I hoped to understand the interpersonal dynamics of plans of assistance and whether they could be made more effective.

It is estimated that incompetent teachers comprise between 2 and 5 percent of the total teacher population (Bridges 1986 and Manning 1988). At first glance, this percentage does not seem

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significant. However, if the 5 percent figure is used, these teachers affect over two million students (Johnson 1984 and Neill and Custis 1978). This figure is equivalent to the school population of fourteen states!

Teacher incompetency colors the public's perception of all teachers. Although incompetent teachers comprise only about 5 percent of the teacher population, they cast a shadow over the remaining 95 percent who fulfill their responsibilities within acceptable standards of professionalism and competence.

Understanding Plans of Assistance

This study of teachers on plans of assistance was intended to improve our understanding of the processes necessary to remediate teachers deemed incompetent. It was also intended to alert educators to the reasons why teachers need help with their classroom performance. Examination of the cases in my study will help administrators and teachers improve the process of a program of assistance and assist their colleagues who are struggling with similar problems.

The study focused on three teachers whose difficulties with teaching resulted from a variety of sources. Isolation and supervision that was spotty in some instances and heavy-handed at other times got teachers into difficulty. Teachers lacked classroom management and discipline skills and instructional skills. Yet despite these problems, the three teachers improved and in two cases were rehired in their positions. What factors made the improvement possible?

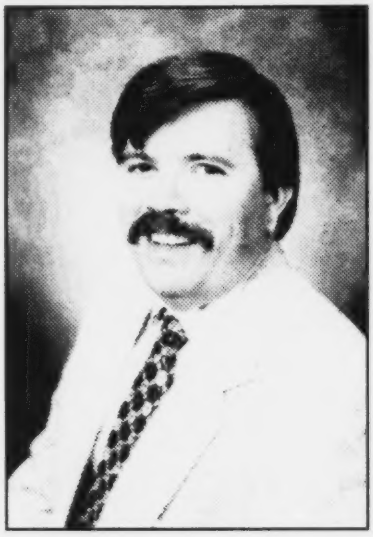
Teacher motivation to improve was evident with all three teachers. Although all three teachers disagreed with administrators' estimation of their teaching skills, all were determined to improve their teaching performance. This motivation opened them up to new possibilities for teaching and helped them take the risks necessary for improvement.

One teacher approached her colleagues for help. She accepted their observations and assistance and her efforts made a difference. Another teacher saw the plan as an opportunity to change how she taught. With her principal's support, she took coursework in classroom management and whole-language instruction and improved her instructional practice. The third teacher was determined to show her principal how talented in educating emotionally disturbed students she was.

Another significant factor was the local education association (LEA) representative. In each case the LEA representative played a critical role in the successful completion of the plan of assistance. Their role mitigated the powerlessness teachers felt when they were placed on the plan of assistance.

This study showed that plans of assistance can be more than the preliminary step before dismissal. Plans of assistance work best when teacher, principal, and education association work together as a team. These efforts must reflect an understanding of the organizational structure of schools and the responsibility each participant brings to the plan of assistance.

The three cases presented below illustrate some of the reasons teachers are placed on plans of assistance, remediation practices used with teachers characterized as incompetent, and dynamics that affect the outcome of plans of assistance.



Doug Herman is an elementary educator with the Springfield School District in Springfield, Oregon, where he is involved with teacher evaluation and technology staff development. He received his M.Ed. and Ph.D. from the University of Oregon. This article is adapted from his recent dissertation, ("Teachers on Plans of Assistance: A Descriptive Study"). Current areas of interest include education administration, staff development, teacher evaluation, and technology in education.

Tina at Revere Junior High School

Tina is a beginning teacher in her early forties who was hired to teach home economics at Paul Revere Junior High School in the Brandywine School District. (All names of individuals and institutions in this article are fictitious). During her first year at Revere she was assigned a mentor teacher to help her adjust to the realities of teaching. Her mentor was a former teacher now assigned as the school's counselor.

Tina's first year at Revere progressed without any noticeable problems, except that she mentioned feeling isolated and alone. Other than several staff parties and regular staff meetings, her mentor made few efforts to connect Tina with other staff members.

In the 1988-89 school year, her first year, Tina's teaching performance was observed and evaluated. She received a good initial evaluation during fall of her first year. The principal wrote:

> I consider Tina's class to be very successful. Her preparation and execution reflected a well-developed lesson design.

Tina returned to Revere in September 1989 to begin her second year of teaching. In November 1989, she was formally observed and evaluated by the principal. In contrast to the previous year's evaluation, this report was critical of Tina's teaching, lesson preparation, instructional procedures, and classroom management. The principal concluded his evaluation by stating:

> I am going to be working with Tina to jointly develop a plan of assistance to address her evaluation. We will schedule our first meeting to start this process at our post conference.

After being notified that she was going to be placed on a plan of assistance, Tina requested that Lou, Brandywine Education Association (BEA) representative, be present at a meeting the principal scheduled to discuss the plan of assistance with Tina.

Reasons for Placing Tina on a Plan of Assistance

The stated rationale for placing Tina on a plan of assistance was to address deficiencies in three areas: (1) lesson planning and preparation, (2) instructional methods and procedures, and (3) classroom management.

Tina's principal placed the most emphasis on part 3 of the plan, which focused on classroom management and discipline. He expected Tina to be more aware of the activities on the periphery of the classroom, as well as in the center of the room and in her immediate vicinity. Also, her response to inappropriate student behavior was to be addressed in her classroom-management plan.

Tina was expected to turn her lesson plans in to the principal's office each Monday and Wednesday prior to the week the lessons were taught. In addition, he asked that a log be kept of all disciplinary actions taken with students, and all parent contact be documented as well. This log was turned in once a week. Tina's plan of assistance specified a general schedule of observations, both announced and unannounced.

The plan was scheduled to be in effect from January 2, 1990, through March 2, 1990, at which time the next steps were to be determined.

The Plan: Teamwork in Action

Tina and Lou contacted Neal, a social studies teacher at Revere, and explained the plan of assistance to him. He agreed to help. Tina's choice of Neal was partly political. She said, "I chose Neal because he had the best one-to-one [rapport] with the principal and he had the best tact."

Tina asked Mary, who taught English and Spanish at Revere, to help her as well. She believed Mary, a doctoral student at a nearby university, would have a good working knowledge of the latest research on teaching skills and strategies.

Mary, Neal, and Lou concentrated on helping Tina with teach-

ing strategies. Neal worked on discipline and classroom management; Mary helped with instructional strategies; and Lou covered the legal, contractual areas of the plan. Tina's plan of assistance became a team effort.

Tina's plan of assistance forced her to examine herself as a teacher and a person.

Neal met with Tina about her discipline and classroom-management philosophy and plan. They worked during Neal's preparation time, after school, and on several weekends. Together they wrote and revised Tina's classroom-management plan, which Tina began to implement.

Tina and Mary collaborated on the instructional methods and planning component of the plan. Mary, like Neal, took time from her preparation and planning time to work with Tina. Mary preferred doing videotaping because she could focus on examples of problem areas as well as positive things Tina was doing in her class. Mary and Tina debriefed Tina's videotaped lessons, discussing what went well and what needed improvement. They then related the observations to Tina's lesson plans.

Based on these experiences, Tina's ability to plan successful lessons improved. With the help of Neal and Mary, Tina also tried new strategies. She improved her vocal technique. Her teaching performance improved. Tina focused more on the group as a whole and less on a selective area or small number of students. She incorporated new classroom-management techniques.

Lou made sure that Tina's improvement was recognized and her legal, contractual interests were fairly represented.

The principal's second formal evaluation report, based on an observation in a Foods I class on March 1, 1990, though shorter than the one in November 1989, was much more positive. In contrast to the initial observation, he noted that Tina's classroom-management approach was attentive and global, rather than narrow and central in focus. She moved around the room from group to group, made constructive comments, and attended to safety concerns. He observed that when each group finished its project, Tina met with the group, evaluated its work, and provided lesson closure. The principal also acknowledged Tina's willingness to improve and the action of the entire team in making the plan of assistance successful.

Beyond the Plan: Limited Success

The rest of the school year went fairly smoothly for Tina. Tina's contract was renewed. Neal, Mary, and Lou felt great about Tina's success. They all agreed that their collaboration helped Tina become a better teacher, and that Tina's motivation to succeed was a critical factor. Tina, on the other hand, was left with some unsettling thoughts about herself as a teacher. She said the plan "made me question whether I am a good teacher or whether I will ever be a good teacher."

Her trust and regard for her principal had been eroded. Their communication was professional but cool and reserved. Tina felt that the plan of assistance had placed a barrier between herself and the principal:

> I did not feel that I had a particularly wonderful working relationship [with the principal] the first year, but I didn't feel that a wall was there. The wall developed when the criticism took place.

Tina recognized the values that prompted Neal, Mary, and Lou to help her improve as a teacher. She has incorporated much of what they helped her learn into her teaching and is very appreciative of the help. Tina commented on how helpful her colleagues were:

> The support from other teachers [in Brandywine] was wonderful.... That's something I've carried with me that's been very valuable.

Tina's plan of assistance forced her to examine herself as a teacher and a person. Her colleagues did not view her as an incompetent teacher, but as someone not wholly prepared for teaching. Tina needed more preservice teaching experience. During her first year at Revere, her mentor did little to help Tina adjust to the uncertainty of teaching. Her principal did not perceive her need for remediation as his direct responsibility. Ultimately, the task of assisting Tina fell to her colleagues.

Joan at Fair Oaks Elementary

Joan is a middle-aged teacher who began her teaching career in the Greenleaf School District about eight years ago. She has taught a variety of grade levels at three different elementary schools in the district. Currently she teaches a primary grade at Fair Oaks Elementary, where she has been for about five years. Joan is married and has two children. She holds two

bachelor's degrees, one in religious education and one in elementary education.

Her teaching career in the Greenleaf district has passed uneventfully. She gained tenure after three successive years of satisfactory evaluations from her principals. In 1987, her second year at Fair Oaks, Tom was hired as principal at the school.

Formal observations would indicate whether Joan was able to apply the strategies to remedy deficiencies addressed by the plan.

Tom was more actively involved in visiting classrooms and observing around the school than Joan's previous principals: "I like to wander through the building all of the time to see what's going on. So I engage in direct observation."

Soon after being hired, Tom heard complaints about Joan from parents and staff. Some parents felt she was too strict and said that their children didn't enjoy her classroom. Staff members also told Tom that they were uncomfortable working with Joan. Colleagues found Joan uncooperative, and many disagreed with her classroom-management style. Tom completed an evaluation cycle of her teaching performance, but was hesitant to put pressure on her based on the initial complaints and his own preliminary observations. He hoped Joan's performance would improve without intervention.

In June 1989, the end of his second year at the school, Tom told Joan he wanted to set three goals for her for the next school year. The goals focused on classroom instruction, parent communication, and staff relations. In September 1989, Tom met with Joan and presented her with yearly performance goals in written form. Tom conducted weekly observations and conferences with Joan.

Unsatisfied with her progress, Tom informed Joan that he intended to meet formally with her and the district's assistant superintendent for personnel about her teaching performance.

The Greenleaf School District has a process to help teachers improve their teaching performance; it's called a professional-improvement plan. It looks and works very much like a formal plan of assistance but is initiated before the plan of assistance. When a teacher is placed on the plan of improvement in the Greenleaf district, he or she is put "on notice." On-notice status tells the teacher and the district that there are serious discrepancies between the teacher's performance and minimally acceptable district standards. The district may dismiss a teacher based on evidence produced by a professional-improvement plan.

Joan was placed on professional-improvement status. If Joan failed to successfully complete the professional-improvement plan, she faced two possible consequences: (1) she could be put on a formal plan of assistance, or (2) she could be dismissed.

Joan asked Laurie, the Greenleaf Education Association representative, to attend the meeting in May 1990 and represent her interests when she met with Tom. Joan felt that Laurie's participation was pivotal to the ultimate success of the plan. Laurie facilitated communication between Tom and Joan. Joan noted that Laurie "was really good to have in the meetings because she . . . [would] ask questions or rephrase questions."

Tom also viewed Laurie's participation as constructive. He said that "Laurie was always there to help to work on things and to help Joan out."

Reasons for Placing Joan on the Professional-Improvement Plan

Tom initially considered writing three goals into the professional-improvement plan. In addition to the goals of improving classroom atmosphere and teacher-student interaction, Tom wanted Joan to work on improving her relations with staff and parents. But in the end, Tom decided not to include this goal.

Tom believed that if Joan met the other goals in the plan of assistance, this would solidify the progress she had made during the 1989-90 school year in her interpersonal dealings with parents and staff.

In working toward the goal of improving classroom atmosphere, Tom wanted Joan to: (1) examine how she began her lessons, (2) allow her students enough time to think about her questions, and (3) use different ways to find out what her students knew about the lesson she was teaching.

Tom monitored Joan's progress through informal weekly classroom observations. Three formal observations were also scheduled to occur toward the end of the plan. Tom's informal observations would give Joan a chance to try new strategies and methods and get his

feedback. Formal observations would indicate whether Joan was able to apply the strategies to remedy deficiencies addressed by the plan.

In addition to this assistance, Tom and Joan discussed ways she could strengthen her instructional skills in reading and language arts. To learn more about the effective use of Success in Reading and Writing program, it was decided that Joan would attend university courses and observe in other classrooms. Joan also agreed to take a course on cooperative learning.

The second goal of Joan's professional-improvement plan involved discipline and classroom management. On the basis of his observations, Tom had concluded that Joan's approach to classroom management was too severe and made her classroom unenjoyable for her students. The goal, as stated in the professional-improvement plan, was for Joan to "establish positive classroom climate by improved management skills."

To meet this goal, Tom made the following recommendations:

1. Behavior standards established at the beginning of the year will be taught, practiced, and tested. Logical consequences, both positive and negative, will be developed with the children for each rule.
2. Give praise for effort and achievement.
3. Document all interventions used with difficult students.

In addition, Tom required Joan to read *Discipline With Dignity* and other books on positive management.

It happened that one of the authors of the book *Discipline With Dignity* was presenting a local workshop on discipline and classroom management as part of a conference in October 1990. The district paid for Joan to attend the two-day workshop, which Joan characterized as "a good experience."

Tom visited Joan's classroom, observed on a weekly basis, and made three formal observations during the professional-improvement plan. Tom evaluated Joan's progress in two ways: (1) discussing the books she was assigned to read, and (2) reviewing records of discipline interventions she used with students.

The plan began in June 1990 and was to be reviewed at the beginning of the new school year. This timeline allowed Joan to (1) take the classes during the summer of 1990, and (2) begin reading books on classroom management. The plan would be in effect until the middle of November 1990, at which time there would be a final evaluation of its success.

Assistance, Monitoring, and Communication

Joan took the planned summer courses and began reading the books that Tom had recommended. Joan asked Laurie, the Greenleaf Education Association representative, to continue to attend all the meetings she had with Tom.

Several times during meetings in June and September, Joan's frustration turned to tears over Tom's focus on what needed changing. Joan wanted Tom to let her know what she was doing well in addition to pointing out deficiencies in her performance. As time passed, Tom and Joan gradually developed ownership of the plan and a vested interest in its outcome.

As the school year progressed, Tom usually made daily observations in Joan's room. Sometimes he stayed for ten to twenty minutes; other times he would merely walk through on his way to other classrooms in the building. He wrote nine observation reports between September 1990 through January 1991. The observational data he gathered included anecdotal records, recording of on-task behavior, and frequency counts of positive-reinforcement statements. He also made recommendations for future action on Joan's part. These data and recommendations provided the basis for their meetings.

As time passed, Tom and Joan gradually developed ownership of the plan and a vested interest in its outcome.

During the first observation, in September 1990, Tom noted that during his visit Joan praised the students twelve times.

Tom's feedback of Joan's lessons and teaching became more positive toward the end of September. He acknowledged Joan's use of wait time and positive reinforcement of desirable classroom behavior. He observed in a variety of situations, including math, reading, language arts, small-group instruction, and large-group instruction. Joan and Tom ended September on a positive note. This positive attitude set the tone for the months to come.

Tom's written feedback in October began with an observation

of a language-arts lesson. His third observation in October was of a language-arts lesson on descriptive words. His feedback was constructive and positive. This observation was the first of his formal observations.

In November 1990, Tom completed two more "Formal Observation" summaries. These notes were a reflection of the data he had collected during his observations. His first observation was of a math class. Joan's objectives for the lesson involved learning about adding numbers with sums less than ten. The students were using manipulatives to practice the addition and demonstrate the concepts they learned. Tom's feedback was generally favorable and positive.

The next feedback from Tom's observations came on November 13. This was the last observational feedback he gave Joan before the review of her professional-improvement plan.

Laurie, Joan, and Tom met to review the plan on November 20, 1990. Joan was feeling more confident about her performance. She felt that the professional relationship between them and Tom's observations were very positive. At the meeting, Tom informed Joan that he had decided to extend the plan:

> I had done observations all the way through the fall. I felt comfortable with what she was doing, but we hadn't quite finished things. I wanted to extend [the plan] . . . [because] I wanted to make sure she could do it most of the year.

Tom's written summary of the meeting provides elaboration:

> The reasons I felt it was important to continue the plan were:
>
> 1. We did not finish the plan completely. I wanted to be certain we were able to have a visitation to Tammi Jones' classroom [to observe her teach a lesson using Success in Reading and Writing].
>
> 2. I wanted to take a little more time to be certain [that] things were still going well after [the first] semester. I felt it was in both our best interests that, if we end the plan, there were not doubts in my mind.
>
> 3. I wanted an opportunity to do some drop-in visits. You asked for some clarification and I said I was hoping for:
>
>   a. about one per week
>   b. about 30 minute average stay
>   c. over a range of subject areas
>   d. there would be a write up after each one and we would discuss them at any time you wanted to talk or try to talk about once every three weeks to review how I felt things were going.

The communication and commitment that both Joan and Tom had developed helped Joan to accept Tom's rationale for extending the plan.

The communication and commitment that both Joan and Tom had developed helped Joan to accept Tom's rationale for extending the plan.

Joan was satisfied with her efforts throughout the plan. Tom agreed that the plan had been very successful up to that point. His report of their meeting noted three instructional areas in which Joan had been successful:

1. Questioning strategies that included a pause allowing all students more time to process an answer.
2. Circulation through the room during some seatwork times that kept you in contact with all kids.
3. Positive interactions with students.

In addition to these areas, Tom complimented Joan on the improvement in her relationships with staff members and parents. He mentioned other staff members' observations and an absence of problems with parents.

Tom closed his summary on a very promising note:

> You had commented you were happier that I had tried to be more positive in our interactions. I hope that will remain that way. I told you that I felt as things stood, and if they continued, I would expect we would be ending the Plan in February when we had our meeting.

November and December passed with a few short visits by Tom to Joan's classroom. Joan came back from winter break in January with her confidence intact. Tom observed a math lesson during the last week in January. This was the last written summary he shared with Joan and Laurie.

On March 5, 1991, Joan and Laurie met with Tom. He presented Joan with a memo that removed her from "on-notice" status. The memo

Positive recognition of her skills helped empower her to make changes in her teaching and teach in a way that she had wanted to.

stated, "Your performance has been very competent this school year and I feel this will continue in the future."

Tom had thought carefully about Joan's completion of the plan. He said, "Obviously I didn't take it lightly when I took her off it. I think she deserved to be off of it. She had a good year."

Tom and Joan finished the school year as colleagues, not adversaries. They had come to see each other in a more positive light. Tom was able to joke with Joan at staff meetings, and Joan was able to reciprocate.

Laurie was pleased that she was able to help Joan and Tom achieve a sense of collegiality. It was especially satisfying because when the process began ten months earlier, Laurie thought that Joan was probably going to be dismissed. She viewed the plan as an opportunity that Tom and Joan had taken advantage of.

Joan felt that Tom's evaluation of her teaching performance shifted from concentrating on her weaknesses to building on her strengths. Positive recognition of her skills helped empower her to make changes in her teaching and teach in a way that she had wanted to. Although she had been in a very difficult situation, in retrospect she was able to view it positively:

> I think that had he [Tom] not changed the way he started looking at his evaluations of me, I would have continued to get the kind of evaluations I had gotten. I might not have been able to pull it off in the same way. But since he was able to give me positive [feedback] . . . . It's just like in your class. If you give a kid positive [reinforcement] they can build on that. He was able to build on my positive [points]. Then I was strong in what I knew I could do.

Joan felt good about her relationship with Tom. The professional-improvement plan had become the catalyst for change in each of them. When I asked Joan about why she thought the plan was successful, she noted that the plan altered her relationship with Tom:

> It brought a whole different relationship into the situation. It's much easier and much more workable. He accepts me. I feel he accepts me much more as a teacher and a professional than he did before. That's helpful. The give and take is there that wasn't there [before the plan].

Linda at Mountain View Middle School

Linda is a young, single teacher in her late twenties. She came to the Sunrise School District from a district outside the Pacific Northwest. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and special education. Linda taught in the Sunrise School District for one year before teaching full-time as a special-education teacher at Mountain View Middle School.

Linda was hired at Mountain View to teach a special education class of severely emotionally disturbed students in a resource room. During the 1989-90 school year, Linda had been assigned half-time at Mountain View. That same year she also served as a half-time teacher for a class of emotionally disturbed students at Sunrise High School. For the 1990-91 school year, the district decided to expand its services for emotionally disturbed students. Linda's teaching assignment expanded from half-time to full-time at Mountain View.

The assistant principal had been hired at Mountain View Middle School in July 1990. Shortly after the school year began, she noticed many of Linda's students in her office with discipline problems that were becoming very time-consuming.

The assistant principal was sympathetic to Linda's plight. She recognized that Linda's class was composed of students who had difficulty controlling their behavior. Nonetheless, she expected Linda to use better judgment and skill in working with her students.

The assistant principal talked with the principal of Mountain View, who visited Linda's classroom in September 1990 to observe her teaching performance.

In fall 1990, the assistant principal met with the principal of Mountain View and the director of special services for the Sunrise School District about Linda's performance. When they met and compared notes, all agreed Linda should be placed on a plan of assistance.

The principal, the district's special services director, and the assistant principal thought carefully about their next step. They knew that if the plan was not successfully

completed, it could mean Linda would need to be dismissed.

The assistant principal and her colleagues felt that they needed help outside the school district to evaluate Linda's performance with severely disturbed students, so they decided to consult with Mr. James, director of a regional facility for severely disturbed adolescents. The assistant principal explained:

> We brought in Mr. James and got his expert opinion because [he is] renowned in that sort of a situation. Mr. James determined that it was not the program. It was the person [Linda] within the program. Mr. James offered suggestions as to what would help her improve.

Linda remembered the director's visit differently. She felt comfortable with his observations and suggestions. It was her understanding that Mr. James had recommended some changes be made in her classroom. She did not recognize that Mr. James's observation would become the basis for placing her on a plan of assistance.

Linda realized her class was a difficult one and there was some room for improvement, but she felt positive about her room and her teaching performance.

The assistant principal, the principal, and the special education director met with Linda in December 1990. They told Linda they intended to place her on a plan of assistance. Until this meeting, Linda had not given much thought to possible consequences of their criticism of her teaching performance.

Linda's relationship with the assistant principal changed after the meeting. Linda recalled her perception of the assistant principal's role in the plan of assistance:

> I think she was as supportive as she could be under the circumstances. That was her first year as assistant principal. She was still learning a lot. I think she felt she had to support the principal.

The assistant principal's role in the plan of assistance and support of the principal diminished Linda's trust in her:

> I did not confide in her too much, mainly because I did not know how much was going back to the principal.... There was a real trust issue. I wanted to trust her, but I did not feel like I could.

After the meeting in early December, Linda called the Sunrise Education Association and asked for help. Patrick, the Sunrise Education Association representative, came to Mountain View Middle School to meet with the administrative staff and Linda about the plan of assistance.

Patrick believed Linda was put on a plan of assistance "for the purpose of getting her out of the building. The goal there was removal."

Patrick and Linda expressed similar feelings about the need to improve some aspects of Linda's teaching performance. Patrick characterized her feelings about being on the plan:

> She accepted that she had problems in the area of management. I think she felt that a lot of the criticisms were picky and unfair. But I think she accepted the fact that there was a problem with discipline.

At a meeting in mid-December 1990, the assistant principal, the principal, and the district's special education director met with Linda and Patrick to present Linda's plan of assistance. Patrick facilitated communication between Linda and the principal. He was there to help clarify issues and make sure that everyone involved in the plan, especially Linda, had a clear understanding of what would happen.

Patrick helped Linda accept the plan of assistance and work toward its successful completion. He informed Linda that her teaching position could be in jeopardy if the plan of assistance was not resolved successfully.

Linda began to feel that the plan was a disciplinary response to her performance rather than a means to help her improve. Linda and Patrick tried to negotiate a more informal approach to the plan of assistance. She believed that a more informal discussion of the problems in her classroom would have helped her more than a formal plan of assistance.

Linda acknowledged the assistant principal's attempts to work with her on an informal basis before the plan of assistance was initiated, but at that point Linda had not considered the problems they discussed to be in need of urgent attention.

The Plan in Action

In January 1991, Linda and Patrick began implementing the plan. First, Linda examined her discipline plan, and then devised a new discipline plan to better meet the needs of her classroom and the behavior of her students.

Linda's discipline plan included the purpose of her classroom and the rules of behavior within the classroom. It also explained the level system and the consequences for compliance and noncompliance with the rules.

During January, Linda worked with a consultant from the regional program for severely disturbed adolescents. Linda believed she was making progress in her manage-

ment of students' behavior problems.

The assistant principal also believed that Linda was improving, but her improvement was still not dramatic enough to significantly change the situation in her classroom.

In addition to reading the articles that the principal and director of special services assigned to her, Linda asked Mr. James to recommend additional reading material. Linda read the articles and discussed them with the principal and director of special services. She visited classrooms at the regional program for emotionally disturbed adolescents. Her visits reinforced her perception that she was doing a good job in her own classroom.

Throughout December 1990 and January 1991, Patrick monitored the meetings between the principal and Linda. From its inception, Patrick had misgivings about the plan of assistance and how it was initiated.

In December 1990, Patrick filed a grievance against the principal at Mountain View. Patrick felt that the principal had acted hastily in placing Linda on a plan of assistance. In January 1991 he followed that grievance with another grievance alleging the plan of assistance was harassment of Linda by the Sunrise School District. Patrick recalled feeling uneasy at the meetings throughout January and early February 1991.

Linda continued working on her classroom-management skills. The principal had suggested that Linda should work on reducing the frequency of students' talking out during class time. In response, Linda and the consultant worked out a plan to ignore "talk-outs." Linda felt the strategy was working well when the principal came in to observe her in mid-January. He did not share her view.

Linda felt that she was making a sincere effort to change things in her classroom, but her efforts were not recognized by the three administrators.

Linda and Patrick were having difficulty determining whether Linda was meeting the requirements of the plan of assistance. She had made her visits and observations in other classrooms, initiated a more comprehensive discipline plan, read more than the required readings, and worked with the consultants. Nevertheless, she recalled that when the principal, the special services director, or the assistant principal observed in her classroom, they did not see improvement.

Linda felt that she was making a sincere effort to change things in her classroom, but her efforts were not recognized by the three administrators. Linda's frustration focused mainly on the principal's responses:

> He [the principal] was saying, "Well here's a problem, fix it." But he wasn't really giving me any answers on how to fix it. What I would do was develop the answers, go back to him, and [say], "Here are my answers." He would say, "Those aren't good enough. Go back and try again."

In February 1991, Patrick and Linda met with the principal and the director of special services. Linda began to experience a great deal of stress in the meetings and in the administrative observations.

Linda and Patrick had difficulty getting a clear answer from the administrators about how Linda was doing on the plan of assistance. They wanted to know if the administrators perceived Linda to be meeting the plan's criteria.

Linda and Patrick viewed the reduction of referrals to the office as a sign of success in meeting part of the plan of assistance. However, the assistant principal saw the situation differently:

> I don't know that Linda had the ultimate [skill-level] base that she needed to improve to the level where she met the plan. I did see an improvement. The first time it was a dramatic swing the other way. It was an overreaction to the initial problem. [I felt Linda's response was,] "Okay, then I won't send them to the office." Then it [discipline problems] would build up within the classroom and reach a real problematic stage.

In late February 1991, Linda and Patrick began to consider what could happen to her. Linda said, "By about February I felt there was nothing I was ever going to be able to do that would please them [the administrators]." Patrick did not think the Sunrise School District would dismiss Linda, but since the final review of the plan of assistance was only a few days away, Patrick called the principal to find out how he was going to handle the situation. The principal told Patrick he was going to recommend that the board not rehire Linda.

Patrick told Linda about his conversation with the principal. At the final review meeting in March

1991, the principal suggested continuing with a new plan of assistance even though he was going to recommend to the superintendent that Linda's teaching contract with the Sunrise School District not be renewed.

Patrick compared the principal's efforts to a football game that has just ended:

> The game is over. The clock's run out. The scoreboard's turned off. But we're going to keep playing another 20 minutes of football! What for? To see who gets hurt?

Beyond the Plan: Negotiating for Dignity

The assistant principal believed that Linda had successfully completed the plan of assistance, but she questioned Linda's level of skill and ability to teach the students at Mountain View. Linda understood that she had successfully passed the plan but her contract with the Sunrise School District would not be renewed. Patrick saw irony in this:

> At the very end we went through the entire plan. Did she do this? Yes. Did she do this? Yes. Through all this, she did everything, and the conclusion is you're dismissed.

After Patrick learned of the principal's decision to recommend nonrenewal of Linda's contract, he was no longer conciliatory and cooperative. Instead, he threatened a lawsuit. Patrick viewed this procedure as a logical next step to protect Linda's rights and put the district on notice that they were willing to negotiate further. The Sunrise Education Association retained a lawyer.

At the same time Linda signed the forms to retain a lawyer, she and Patrick talked about her future. He wanted to know what Linda was willing to go through at this stage of the process. Linda had two choices: (1) She could sue to get her job back, or (2) she could strike an agreement with the district to resign gracefully. Linda wanted to sue to get her job back. Once she had her job back and felt vindicated, she thought she would then resign.

The SEA lawyer contacted the district's assistant superintendent. She told him that she represented Linda and was authorized to negotiate on her behalf. If the school district did not want to negotiate further, she would go ahead with legal proceedings. The assistant superintendent responded that the school district would prefer to negotiate.

Patrick believed that Linda had performed well on the plan of assistance and that she should be rehired for another year. But he and Linda's lawyer had to find a tactful way to accept less than that for her. Linda, Patrick, their lawyer, and the assistant superintendent worked out an agreement that Linda found acceptable.

Linda resigned as a teacher with the Sunrise School District effective at the end of the 1990-91 school year. She recalled the terms that allowed her to resign from the district:

> So instead of me suing and doing the grievance, I would just resign, put in my letter of resignation. They would purge my files of all the information, of all the plan of assistance information. They wouldn't talk about it to anybody. Both the special ed supervisor and the principal would write me letters of recommendation and hand them to me in unsealed envelopes so I could read them before they were sent. . . . They handed me the whole file. They just handed me the whole plan of assistance file when it was finished.

In July 1991, Linda accepted a job with an agency that serves families and children with disabilities. She is a liaison between this agency, families, and school districts. One of the districts she deals with is Sunrise.

Neither Linda nor the principal has allowed negotiations around her former position with the school district to jeopardize their new professional working relationship. Both were willing to put past events and the plan of assistance behind them.

Although Linda's plan of assistance was successfully completed in a literal sense, Linda and Patrick were unhappy with the ultimate outcome. Linda was able to secure another position, but not in the classroom. Should she find another teaching position, the problems at Mountain View won't be shared with her new employer. Depending on one's point of view, that may be good or bad.

Why Did the Plans of Assistance Work?

In analyzing the three case studies presented in this study, two similarities stand out. The first is teacher motivation. Lortie (1975) reported that teachers rely on a high degree of intrinsic motivation to offset the uncertainties of teaching. Tina, Joan, and Linda were motivated to succeed despite feelings of animosity toward their principal and personal injury to their self-esteem and identity as teachers. All three teachers felt that even though their plans were unfair, they could become better teachers. Tina and Linda were novice teachers, and Joan was tenured with eight years' experience. Although Bridges (1992) reports better success in remediating new teachers and teachers with less experience, all three teachers in this study showed improvement as measured by the

successful completion of their plan of assistance.

Tina was motivated by a desire to show her principal that she was better than he realized and that her colleagues viewed her as a competent educator. She felt that if they were willing to put a great deal of time, effort, and trust into working with her, she must be worthy of that trust.

Joan was motivated by an opportunity to teach in a way she had been unable to previously. She felt constrained by the district's official basal-reading program. The professional-improvement plan afforded her a chance to try different approaches to teaching, and Tom encouraged her in these efforts.

Linda's motivation came from a sense of pride and confidence that she could overcome anything the principal put in her way. She figured she knew more about classroom instruction of seriously emotionally disturbed adolescents than her principal. She decided to expend the effort to make the plan a success.

The second similarity was active representation by the local education association. In each case, the education association representing the teachers realistically believed the teachers could make the changes necessary to complete their respective plans of assistance. The education association representatives actively supported the teachers in that belief. They played critical roles in the teachers' success by balancing the powerful role the principal played as they initiated the plan of assistance.

In the first case, Lou, as a member of Tina's team, made sure that legal and contractual agreements were met, that timelines were followed, and that John, the principal, was informed of Tina's progress and preparation. He accompanied Tina whenever she met with John about her plan of assistance.

In the second case, Laurie facilitated communication between Joan and Tom. She helped each of them see the goals they had in common and enabled them to talk with one another about strategies and goals. Laurie provided emotional support and encouragement for Joan throughout the plan of assistance.

In the third case, Patrick, as an advocate for Linda, provided encouragement and realistic assessment of her progress on the plan. He also let her know what could happen if she did not complete the plan successfully. When Linda successfully completed the plan of assistance but was not rehired by the district, Patrick negotiated a dignified exit for Linda.

Although the three local education association representatives played different roles in each case, in each case their actions and involvement with the plan increased the likelihood that the teacher would successfully complete the plan.

Implications of This Study

What needs to evolve from a successful plan of assistance is a higher standard of teaching and supervision of teaching. In the three cases presented, the participants expressed a feeling that the remediation process was more of an endurance contest than an exercise in teacher improvement. Future participants in plans of assistance should seek ways to keep the process focused more on teacher improvement and development and less on fear and recrimination.

Placing teachers on a plan of assistance strikes at the very core of their self-esteem. Overcoming the hurt and mistrust that a teacher feels requires skill and perseverance. None of the administrators interviewed for this study had professional coursework or classes in developing and implementing plans of assistance. One principal cited an afternoon inservice given by a lawyer as the only training he had received. Administrators must gain effective skills provided through coursework and administrative training. These skills can be refined through practical experience. From the practical application of effective strategies, administrators will need to recognize and deal with their own feelings of frustration and impatience as teachers struggle to improve.

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